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For Immediate Release

August 16, 2006

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Hardiman addresses national group of state legislators on welfare system challenges

NASHVILLE - During the 2006 National Conference of State Legislatures this week, Sen. Bill Hardiman addressed the group on the overrepresentation of minority children in Michigan's welfare system.

He was joined during the presentation by Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

According to a report released in March, white children represent 72.1 percent of the total population of minors in Michigan, but only 38.8 percent of those in foster care. Black children represent 17.5 percent of the total population, but 53.2 percent of those in foster care. Native American and African American children historically represent a disproportionate population of welfare recipients across the nation.

"Last year I requested the department form a group to look into this issue in greater detail and raise awareness to this increasing trend," said Hardiman, chairman of the Michigan Senate DHS budget subcommittee and the Families and Human Services committee. "I think it is crucial DHS examine the causes and extent of the situation in order to find a solution. This report is the first step in what is going to be an involved process to provide all children and families with equal opportunities."

Hardiman also is chairman of the NCSL Human Services Committee which discussed how some states have made racial equity a public policy priority and identified promising practices to reduce the disproportionate number of minorities and negate outcomes for children of color in child welfare.

"We cannot address this issue in isolation, it must be part of a bigger mindset to strengthen families, promote healthy marriages and encourage fatherhood," Hardiman said. "Since I have been in the Senate I have focused much of my time advocating for marriage and fatherhood programs. Strong healthy marriages are the bedrock of our society - I truly feel the dollars we have invested in those programs will provide dividends in long run."